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## The Organism: Connectivity, Isolation, and the Shifting Territories of the Digital Age

### Abstract

This paper delves into the profound transformations brought about by the advent of the digital age, marked by the emergence of "the organism." Drawing upon Deleuze's notion of the transition from disciplinary societies to societies of control, the concept of rhizomatic structures, and ideas surrounding schizophrenia, the paper explores how the organism, a complex web of interconnected devices and data centers, has reshaped human communication, knowledge acquisition, and societal structures. It highlights the paradox of increased global interconnectivity coexisting with heightened feelings of isolation. The paper also addresses the influence of capitalism on the organism, notably through datafication and the centralization of user data. Furthermore, it discusses how individuals with ADHD are now ideal participants in this digital ecosystem, leading to both the idealization and resistance of ADHD within the organism. Finally, the paper touches upon the Deleuzian concept of the "Body without Organs" to analyze the organism's impact on human society and the blurring of boundaries between the physical and digital worlds. As our world continues to be reterritorialized by the organism, it sets the stage for further societal transformations and challenges.

### Introduction

In the 1970s, Foucault made an argument that we live in the age of discipline. It is characterized by hierarchical observation, punishment, and authoritarianism (Foucault, "Discipline and Punish" 170). In this society, one graduates from the bottom of one closed environment to another. One graduates from school as a student, and enters the workforce as a worker, then enters the prison as a prisoner or the hospital as a patient (Foucault, "Madness and Civilization" 160-161). In the 1990s, Deleuze argues that we have passed the age of discipline and are in the age of control. The hierarchical observation and authoritarianism have been replaced by datafication and tracking (Deleuze, "Postscripts on Societies of Control" 3). As society has broken definitions and boundaries regarding gender, sexuality, race, mental illness, politics, and almost every facet of human life, we blur what things mean, and destroy them. Instead of graduating from one closed environment to another, we have decimated the barriers encapsulating these closed environments. One now works during school, retires during work, is a hospital patient while in prison, and constantly shifts between these now-open environments. Because the closed environment's walls have been crumbled, they are absorbed into one, large, and open multiplicity. This change can be seen through the evolution of video games. In the 80s and 90s, one would play a game of Mario where the player begins at the start of every level, and graduates to the next level periodically. Now, one plays Call of Duty online with people throughout the world. There is no objective end in sight and no graduation to the next level. A player moves throughout the open environment of Call of Duty without completion. Furthermore, players are datafied by the number of kills, deaths, and victories they achieve and are systematically ranked by "level" based on these achievements. The evolution of video games is an analogy for the shift that occurred from the end of the 20th century into the modern day.

This shift has worked in tandem with the rise of technology in the digital age. As technology pervades humanity, humanity becomes reliant on technology. Through the reliance on technology, a new

being emerges, the organism. The organism is a mediator for humanity, while humans use the organism to interact with one another, humans become reliant on the organism to interact with one another. This poses a paradox that the digital era has been plagued with. On one hand, humans are more interconnected than ever before. In an instance, a human in the US can talk to a human in India. Constantly, without even thinking about it, we have communicated through social media with everyone across the globe. On the other hand, humans have felt more isolated now than ever. This is because, while humans have the ability to connect with any human, they are forced to connect with everybody through the organism. A human must communicate directly with the organism to communicate indirectly with another person. This establishes a superficiality to human communication and a barrier that does not allow humans to directly communicate with each other.

Not only does the organism alter the communication between humans, but it reshapes every aspect of humanity through constant deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Instead of learning from books, we learn from YouTube videos, documentaries, and digital content. Instead of using physical maps, we use Google Maps. Furthermore, the organism reterritorializes to make humanity reliant on the organism. We are reliant on iPhones to communicate with one another, digital GPS for transportation, and laptops to work. Whereas before paper and pencil was the sole device for writing, the organism replaced it with laptops and phones. We have replaced the individuality of paper and pencil with interconnectivity through the organism. The organism, emerging from our reliance on technology, engenders a complex interplay between connectivity and isolation in the digital age. Through the dynamic processes of reterritorialization and deterritorialization, it actively shapes the digital landscape, blurring traditional boundaries, and assumes the role of an intermediary in human interactions. This multifaceted influence extends to communication, information sharing, and self-presentation, redefining social norms, identity formation, and economic structures in our increasingly interconnected world.

### **The Technological Entity: An Open, Living Organism**

#### *Characteristics of the Organism*

The organism exhibits an open and dynamic structure, embodying a multiplicity of interconnected devices and data centers, forming the physical foundation of its existence. There is no structural form or arborescent nature to the organism. Instead, the organism is completely rhizomatic, flowing freely from one sector of humanity to another. First, there was the Macintosh (1984), then the iPod (2001), then the iPhone (2007), which are linear developments. Next is Airplay (2010), AirPods (2016), Apple Homekit (2014), Apple Music (2015), Apple Pay (2014), and Apple Maps (2012). Apple expanded rhizomatically, to new territories that had been untouched.

Furthermore, every Apple device is interconnected; the iPhone connects with AirPods to play Apple Music which can be bought with Apple Pay. Interconnection is not solely within companies, but between companies as well. Located on the iPhone is Google Drive which shares files with the Windows Laptop that can be printed on a printer. One task, printing a photo taken on a phone, takes a multiplicity of interconnected devices, and thus separate companies. Technology, such as Bluetooth, is created for the sole purpose of interconnecting one entity to another, creating a homogenous multiplicity. This interconnectedness has slowly reterritorialized human communication. In 2023, there were 5.81 billion internet users worldwide, which is 60% of the global population (Petrosyan). These people could access over 55 million Wikipedia articles, which are available in over 300 languages (Wikimedia Foundation). Once inside a Wikipedia page, one could click an internal hyperlink, connecting that very user to another side of the organism. If one were to find a humorous article, one could send it to another person via one of

the 23 billion globally connected devices (Taylor). While the organism is vast and encompasses all sides of human life, one can teleport from one sector of the multiplicity to another in an instant.

Additionally, the physical foundation of devices connects the digital world to the material world. From another angle, rapid progression and expansion in both the digital and material worlds flow from the device. It is the device, which connects two separate lands, that interconnects every human, company, and object instantaneously.

Tapping into the organism creates both enhanced connectivity and barriers to human interaction, as evidenced by studies revealing the isolating effects of excessive social media and smartphone reliance. Every day, we are introduced to strangers and reconnected with acquaintances through social media. We physically see each other constantly and communicate with each other at a rate never seen before. When before, one had to write and mail a letter, now that very same person can text. It would be rational to assume that humans would feel more connected than ever before because of the extreme expansion of technology, yet humans are more isolated than ever before. This is because, now, humanity is reliant on the organism to communicate. There is no other option aside from texting, emailing, or calling. A human must tap into a device, a third entity, teleporting inside the digital world, to indirectly connect with another human. To connect indirectly with another human, one must connect directly to their device. There is no face-to-face interaction, only phone-to-phone. Humanity became reliant on the organism to communicate. According to the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, spending more than 30 minutes per day on social media platforms is correlated with increased feelings of loneliness and depression (Liu M). Teenagers who use technology multiple times daily have higher chances of obesity, attention span, and overall well-being (Rosen LD). With 1 billion active users on Instagram and 2.8 active users on Facebook worldwide, the constant and consistent interaction with the organism is what creates a dynamic, rhizomatic structure that indefinitely reterritorialization. It is an entity of constant becoming through the repetition, in the Deleuzian sense, of tapping into the organism, which endlessly expands the digital and material worlds.

#### *Interconnectedness and the Role of the Internet*

Examples of interconnectedness, such as the presence of hyperlinks on platforms like Wikipedia, foster a web of interconnected knowledge, enabling seamless navigation between diverse topics. As stated previously, Wikipedia exemplifies interconnection inside a structure, between structures, and between humans. Wikipedia, itself a structure, is interconnected through hyperlinks within an article that sends the user to another article. There is no escape from Wikipedia's open structure. One is constantly teleported to a new area within Wikipedia, which allegorically connects to how there is no escape from the open structure in societies of control (Deleuze, "Postscripts on Societies of Control" 3-5). Wikipedia also acts as a connector, connecting two structures. It is the hyperlink that connects Berlin to Germany within a Wikipedia article. While this is a simple example of connectivity as a hyperlink to Germany can be found within the article on Berlin (and vice versa), every single article is interconnected, through hyperlinks, to every other article. These articles act as the digital representation of the physical entity. Even though the article is a digital representation, it is still found within the concept that contains both digital and physical representations (ie: the concept of Berlin is found both within the city of Berlin itself and the Wikipedia article representing Berlin). The hyperlinks, thus, have two roles, one as a structure itself and another as a connector between two structures. This digitizes knowledge, forcing a human to tap into the organism to access information. This mass digitization of information is not the only thing that reinforces connectivity.

The internet, serving as a medium for connectivity, also reinforces reliance on the organism as indicated by the global reach and influence of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. As Zuboff mentions in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, companies carefully curate a monopoly over the digital world. In 2006, Google paid \$1.65 billion for YouTube which, at the time, had never made any money. The reason was that “it ensures millions and millions of viewers are coming to a Google-owned site rather than someone’s else’s site,” (Zuboff 73). Companies ensure there is no escape from the organism. One is forced to interact with the organism. While having no escape helps reinforce reliance on the organism, companies also must ensure that consumers keep returning. This is why, when Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google, was asked about why Google had 150 products, Eric responded by stating that Google had only 1 product, “customer satisfaction”. Technological platforms owned by monopolies simultaneously limit all competition while giving consumers enough satisfaction to continue using these sites. This provides a stable foundation for the organism to spread throughout society.

### **Capitalism’s Impact on the Organism**

Capitalism significantly influences the organism through the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Throughout history, music has been a communal activity. Music was indulged by the masses. Groups of humans went to mass, and symphonic halls, or danced to music outside. This all changed with the development of records, vinyls, walkmans, and iPods. At first, the music industry expanded rapidly because of the new-found accessibility. As more people began using these devices to listen, the organism rapidly reterritorialized the music industry so that consumers became reliant on the organism. Now, music is a deeply intimate and personal activity. Now when someone is listening to music, they are often not communicating with others or in a group of people. In the first quarter of 2021, Spotify had over 356 million monthly active users worldwide (Gotting). Now, artists’ are reliant on the organism to advertise their music and consumers are reliant on the organism to consume music (McPherson and Welch, 212; McKay et al, 7). Before, there was a direct connection between the artist and the audience through symphony centers, whereas, through the reterritorialization of the music industry, there is an indirect connection between the artist and the audience because the organism acts as an intermediary. Similar examples are also found with the rise of Amazon and online markets or the rise of Netflix and cinema. Furthermore, these companies act without an end in sight. This is why companies rely on never-ending subscription services (Spotify Premium, Amazon Prime, Netflix). The organism is not restricted to the confines of space or time, stretching infinitely across digital worlds forever.

### **Singularity and Datafication**

Capitalism’s influence manifests in the singularity of the organism, where data collection and analysis become central, evident in the prevalent collection of user data and the growing awareness of online tracking. To continue customer satisfaction, reliance, rapid expansion, and capital growth, the organism is reliant on data collection. Because of the constant interaction with the organism with no escape, the organism, in turn, collects data through these interactions. By searching a question in Google, the question is logged, saved, sold, and used by an advertising service to target an advertisement to the user. 72% of Americans feel that most or all of what they do online is being tracked by companies, and 67% of consumers are willing to share their personal information with companies if it leads to personalized offers or discounts (Auxier). This is where the organism transforms from a multiplicity of corporations into a singularity. These corporations are forcibly intertwined by sharing information about each user. It is a win-win situation for the corporations: I get more information on the user and, in

exchange, you get more information on the user. Thus, the organism is centralized, and solidified into one, through online tracking. All of the moving parts within the organism work together to force users to become reliant, give users enough satisfaction to return, and then sell users to advertising agencies.

The implications of datafication encompass individual agency, privacy concerns, and the amplification of capitalist systems, reflected in the willingness of consumers to share personal information in exchange for personalized offers. Consumers want to share their personal information if it grants more efficiency and more money. In return, individuals lose their individuality. Users are datafied and objectified by their digital history. Next, users are followed. Tracking is a temporal activity that attempts to understand a person over time. By constantly tracking users relentlessly, companies understand private information. Finally, this private information is sold to advertisers, expanding the capitalist system. Capitalism is reliant on the constant trade of goods and services. In this context, the capitalist system is amplified by reterritorializing the human and transforming the human from a person to an object. The implications of datafication are the buying and selling of humans (their attention, personal information, etc). In a twisted fate, the system that was marketed as more humane and a better alternative than the buying and selling of humans through slavery (to work) has developed into the buying and selling of humans (their attention).

### **ADHD: the Ideal Human yet the New Schizo**

The constant connectivity and information overload of the organism renders individuals with ADHD as ideal participants in this digital ecosystem. The organism hijacks the eccentric, ADHD mind. Or, the organism creates ADHD (eccentricity, schizophrenic) to hijack individuals. ADHD becomes a part of the organism, interconnected within the multiplicity. The mind is absorbed. The constant flow of information, the flow of the organism, feeds ADHD. And so does ADHD flow into the organism, exchanging content for attention. As Mark Fisher wrote in *Capitalist Realism*, ADHD was “a pathology of late capitalism - a consequence of being wired into the entertainment control circuits of hypermediated consumer culture,” (Fisher, 25). Furthermore, the individual with ADHD is constantly reterritorializing its surroundings, a constant shift and perpetual flux. Thus, the organism’s constant reterritorialization connects with and expands upon the reterritorialization found within ADHD. ADHD, in this case, is not a disorder, but the ideal human in a society overtaken by the organism. ADHD is order. ADHD becomes the exemplar. Pharmaceutical companies make millions off of the treatment of ADHD, further incentivizing an individual to be diagnosed. The organism profits off of this manipulation.

However, ADHD also becomes the enemy. In this sense, ADHD is the trojan horse to the organism (Basu). ADHD integrates itself and slowly changes the foundation of capitalism within. The ADHD resists conformity to society, questioning the rigid structures held at the foundation of capitalism. As an example, in school, ADHD receives accommodation (extra time on tests, an iPad to type if they have dysgraphia). These accommodations attack the rigid structure of the school which is meant to teach students how to fit within the capitalist society. How do we teach students how to listen, when, through accommodations, the teacher is forced to listen? These practices flow into the workplace. Many people with ADHD challenge the traditional 9-5 office culture and advocate working remotely. These practices are not even gatekept by those with ADHD. Now, many people, including people without ADHD, advocate for these practices. ADHD forces diversity, as workplaces are forced to welcome neurodivergence into the office. While more people become diagnosed with ADHD, more offices have to accommodate them. Finally, the ADHD does not produce, it consumes. To produce is typical and old-fashioned, whereas to consume is new. It consumes. It consumes content fed by the organism, thus

breaking the cycle of production required for late-stage capitalism. Who is there to produce when the organism incentivizes constant consumption?

### **The Organism as a Body without Organs: Analysis of Rhizomatic Territorialization**

Deleuze's concept of the "Body without Organs" finds relevance in understanding the organism, as it encompasses the exploration of reterritorialization and deterritorialization within power structures and territories, providing insight into the organism's dynamics. The organism is a Body without Organs. It is constantly and rhizomatically creating new connections and possibilities because of its lack of structure. This lack of structure, however, is what makes it so different from anything the world has seen. No innovative technology has rapidly changed the world like how the digital age has. Due to its lack of structure and organization, the organism can adapt to all environments, deterritorializing them by absorption. It is similar to cancer that rapidly spreads, without end in sight, through the body. It corrupts and alters the foundation of structures as cancer corrupts the cells of a body. It has even shifted the very nature of capitalism. Where before capitalism hierarchically ordered humans into creating a good to be bought, humans are now the good being bought. There is no need for a hierarchically structured workforce with the implementation of artificial intelligence. Instead, capitalism becomes rhizomatic to facilitate the purchasing of human attention on a mass scale. Attention is constantly moving within the open structure of the organism which is used for the profit of companies. The emergence of creativity that Deleuze envisioned would come in a rhizomatic society is being tracked and used for targeted advertisement. Capitalism reterritorialized capitalism, transforming the previously closed, hierarchical structure into an open, rhizomatic structure. While the former capitalism is forced to establish hierarchies to control humans into being producers, the latter forces humanity into a position of constant consumption. Additionally, it is the personal information humans are willing to give to consume that is bought and purchased which continues capitalism.

The extension of the line of flight signifies the organism's expansive influence, demonstrated by the global dependence on the internet for various activities, leading to significant societal transformations. Currently, the organism is making the shift in our world that pushes humanity past structures and boundaries. As the organism continues to constantly deterritorialize as a Body without Organs, society as a whole will follow suit due to the rise in global dependency on the organism. Furthermore, the deterritorialization and reterritorialization processes of the organism shape human experiences, societies, and the plane of consistency, shedding light on the societal implications of digital technology. An example of this effect could be the ideas surrounding simulacra, simulation, and hyperreality presented by Baudrillard. Simulation continues to expand through the rapid development of the organism. In addition, hyperreality can be characterized by reliance on the organism. As humanity becomes reliant on the organism, which continually corrupts simulacra and simulation through rhizomatic expansion and reterritorialization, humans further blur the line between what is simulacra and what is simulation. Because of the organism's rhizomatic nature, the lack of structure can be confusing for humans. Furthermore, the organism as a mediator between human connections causes isolation. Finally, as humans become more reliant on the organism and the digital world, humanity becomes detached from the physical world.

### **Conclusion**

The shift from the age of discipline to the age of control, facilitated by the organism, has brought forth significant transformations in human society. The interconnected and rhizomatic nature of the

organism has reshaped communication, knowledge acquisition, and societal structures. It highlights the paradoxical effects of increased connectivity, leading to both global interconnectivity and feelings of isolation. Reliance on the organism as a mediator has blurred traditional boundaries and redefined social norms. Capitalism's influence is evident in the commodification of personal information and the reterritorialization of industries. The organism's impact extends to various aspects of human life, including communication, knowledge dissemination, and self-presentation. Furthermore, it places humanity in a state of constant consumption. Humans are forced to consume in order to keep the organism alive.

In conclusion, the age of control, embodied by the organism, has brought forth a transformative era. Its interconnected and rhizomatic nature has reshaped society, offering both enhanced connectivity and isolating effects. The reliance on the organism as a mediator has blurred boundaries, redefined norms, and commodified personal information. As we navigate this evolving digital landscape, further societal transformations and challenges await.

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